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AUTHOR Norris, Lindy
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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the Education Department of Western Australia commissioned a research project to investigate the implementation and development of second language learning for special needs students in three diverse elementary education support settings. This paper presents project findings. Researchers documented implementation, collected and analyzed all documents relevant to the program, interviewed staff and parents, observed student learning, and recorded learning outcomes at each school. The idea of special needs children learning a second language elicited a range of views and responses from staff, students, and parents associated with the three education support settings. Overall, administrators', teachers', and parents' views about second language learning for special needs students varied by their beliefs about what language learning meant and by the extent to which their philosophy of education for special needs students was driven by functionalism. Many parents and teachers who were initially hesitant about the program changed their minds to support the program once they understood it. Students were very positive about the experience. Implementation of a second language learning program for these students posed unique problems within each of the different settings. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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TWO LANGUAGES TOO: SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Dr Lindy Norris

Coordinator of Applied Language Education

School of Education
Murdoch University
Western Australia

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Abstract

In 1998 the Education Department of Western Australia commissioned a research project to investigate the implementation and development of second language learning in three different education support settings. This paper reports on the findings of this research project. The idea of special needs children[1] learning a second language elicited a range of views and responses from staff, students and parents associated with the three education support settings that were the case study sites for this research. In addition, implementation of a second language posed different problems within each of the different settings. From this study, however, it has been possible to develop a set of principles and practices able to inform the teaching and learning of a second language within such educational contexts. The learning outcomes of the special needs students involved in the study are also reported.

[1] The term 'special needs' is used, within the context of this paper, to describe students with a range of learning disabilities.

Background to the research project

The genesis of this research project came from two significant Western Australian curriculum initiatives. In 1995 the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) launched its *LOTE 2000: New Horizons Strategy*. This strategy mapped the implementation of LOTE learning for all students in years 3 to 10 in government schools. By the year 2000, within the primary sector, this goal had been achieved and secondary implementation was well under way.

The second curriculum initiative to impact on the development of this research project was the 1998 introduction of the *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia* by the state's Curriculum Council. This document describes the mandated learning outcomes that all students in Western Australian schools should be given the opportunity to achieve. The Framework, scheduled for full implementation by 2004, sets out 13 Overarching Learning Outcomes and 66 outcomes that students are expected to achieve through eight mandated learning areas of the Curriculum. One of the stipulated learning areas is Languages Other Than English, or LOTE.

The implementation of these major initiatives raised the issue of the viability and desirability of children with special needs learning a language other than English. Principals of education support schools and centres, together with their school communities, sought information and requested advice, from the Education Department, in relation to LOTE, to the implementation of LOTE as a key learning area, and the implications for their students. A number of key issues were identified:

- Could or indeed *should* children with special needs learn a second language?
- How did educators, parents and students feel about the learning of a second language?

- What were the implementation issues?
- What would the outcomes of second language learning be for these students, and how could these outcomes be monitored?

To address these issues the LOTE Learning Area in the Education Department of Western Australia commissioned the research study reported in the following pages. The outcomes sought by the Department were:

- a report outlining the implementation process in each of three case study settings, including monitoring student progress against the Western Australian LOTE Student Outcome Statements;
- a description of the benefits, or otherwise, of LOTE learning to students in education support settings; and
- the production of a set of guidelines, based on the experiences of the three participating schools, which can support principals and staff in education support settings in the implementation of LOTE programs appropriate to the needs of their students.

The research project was conducted collaboratively across three case study sites, by a team from the Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development at Murdoch University and Simpson Norris International.

The case study sites

The three sites selected for this study were chosen in order to reflect the diversity of circumstances of special needs children; to provide information across a range of languages; and to both capitalise on, and critique, some work that had been commenced in the area of

second language learning and children with special needs. All three sites were primary school settings and each was at a different stage of LOTE implementation.

Merriwa Education Support Centre

This centre, which is integrated with Merriwa Primary School, introduced an Italian LOTE program in 1996 in response to the *LOTE 2000 Strategy*. At the time of the study the centre catered for approximately 30 children with mild to severe intellectual disabilities with some also being physically disabled. In addition, social disadvantage was a characteristic of a proportion of the school population. A number of students were integrated into the primary school for some of their learning experiences, and there was a degree of social interaction between the primary school students and the students enrolled in the centre.

The LOTE program was taught by an experienced primary teacher who was also a specialist teacher of Art and Italian. The teacher taught at the centre one day a week and also coordinated a partial immersion program at a nearby primary school. The program was structured with the students being organised into three classes — junior, middle and upper. Classroom teachers and aides were in attendance during Italian lessons and were encouraged to participate and learn with the students.

Creaney Education Support Centre

Located at the rear of the Creaney Primary School campus, this centre had no experience of LOTE prior to the commencement of the research project. The centre catered for 24 students all with a perceived intellectual disability who could not be catered for in the academic areas within mainstream education. A small number of students were integrated into some activities in the primary school.

Even though the interaction between the primary school and the education support centre was minimal, the centre chose to implement the same language taught in the primary school. The teacher appointed to teach Japanese in the centre had no experience of special needs children, was secondary trained and had only limited experience working within a primary school context.

Carson Street School

This is the only government Junior Education Support School in Western Australia. It caters for approximately 40 children ranging from 3 to 13 years who have intellectual disabilities and who are unable to integrate into the regular system. Students require extensive therapy and other educational services. There is a physiotherapist, a speech therapist and an occupational therapist on staff, and other medical and dental services are available. Half of the student population is classified as non-verbal.

The Spanish program was introduced in the school in 1998 because of the interest of the school's deputy principal. It is taught by an experienced teacher of children with special needs and, in addition, the program is supported by several other members of the staff who are able to integrate some Spanish into other learning experiences.

The case study sites presented a real diversity of experiences, attitudes and issues in terms of LOTE implementation. They also offered the research team the opportunity to critically examine the outcomes of LOTE learning for the full spectrum of primary aged special needs children.

The research process

A review of the literature

The starting point for the research project was to review the literature as represented in sources related to both the areas of special education and linguistics. The literature is not extensive. Most of the relevant research has been conducted in either the USA or the UK with there being little reference to the Australian context. The review did, however, serve to draw out a number of issues pertinent to the research project.

The literature highlighted difficulties associated with defining the area. Much of the American literature refers to 'special education' but relates to language minority students. These students, who are predominantly Hispanic, are also socially disadvantaged. Whether the poor academic performance of these students in mainstream curriculum was related to learning disability or to their second language/social deficit status was an issue of contention in the literature, and it seemed to have an immediate relationship to one of the case study sites selected for this research project.

Another dimension to emerge through the literature was the special educators' perspective versus the foreign language education specialist perspective. The viewpoints of Mabbott (1995) and Sparks et al (1995) highlight the fact that this research project crossed a significant divide. For the findings to be considered 'valid' on both sides of the divide, it was important to have a research team with expertise in special needs/education support, second language education, and also curriculum and school leadership and planning.

A third factor of particular significance coming out of the literature was that historically, within the context of the societies where research has been done, second/foreign language

study has been seen as belonging to the academic elite. Foreign language students were perceived as being 'gifted' or 'talented' because of the privileged status of languages in the curriculum (Wright et al, 1995; Finamore, 1993). Second or foreign languages were seen as being difficult and certainly beyond the reach of children with learning disabilities. The prevailing view in societies such as ours has been that there is no point in learning a second language if a student cannot read and write English 'properly'. The extent to which such perceptions were to impact on this study was a salient point.

It is interesting to note that the literature makes no mention of hostility by children to the learning of a second language. There is also little reference to parents and their roles and opinions in regard to this area. The criticality of the teacher was highlighted through the literature and there was some attention to pedagogical practices.

The factors discussed above, together with the key issues identified by the Education Department of Western Australia, informed the formation of the project team and the development and execution of the research process.

The project team: Roles, responsibilities and actions

A research associate was appointed to each of the three case study sites. The responsibilities for each associate did vary according to the stage of implementation at each site and in response to factors peculiar to each site. All associates were, however, required to document implementation, to collect and analyse all documents relevant to the program, to liase with staff and parents where appropriate, to interview staff and parents, to observe student learning, and also, to record learning outcomes. Each associate was required to spend at least one day per week on site for a period of eight months. In reality, much more time was spent

on site with each research associate becoming an integral member of the school's community for the duration of the research project.

In addition to research associates, the project team comprised a special needs consultant, a second language consultant, and a consultant in the area of educational psychology. All sites were visited regularly by these consultants and by a film crew whose responsibility it was to fully document the research project. There were also numerous meetings between associates, consultants, educators, parents and members of the film crew.

Documenting the findings of the research

Three detailed case studies were written as part of this research. In addition, two videos have been produced with one specifically designed for educators and one for the parents of special needs children. Prior to publication, the case studies and videos were critiqued fully by schools and their communities to ensure that they accurately represented second language implementation and second language learning at each of the three case study sites. The case studies, the videos and the literature review all informed the development of a set of implementation guidelines for use by education support centres and schools when planning for, implementing, and monitoring their LOTE program.

In the following pages the key findings of the research project will be discussed.

Second language learning: Stakeholder views before and after

Before

The idea of children categorised as learning disabled being required to learn a language other than English, not surprisingly, evoked a range of responses from principals, teachers and parents. The responses from these quarters demonstrated that there were two prominent standpoints that governed how the idea of learning a language other than English was received within the context of education for children with special needs.

In the first instance there was the issue of what stakeholders thought language learning meant. Where language learning was perceived to be either something that academically able students did, or where language proficiency, particularly spoken proficiency, was seen as the intended outcome, there was considerable initial resistance. Comments made included:

> *Well I was totally surprised. I thought, well these kids have trouble with language generally anyway and I was very surprised that they would even think about introducing LOTE. ... and I was very reluctant at the time.*
>
> special needs teacher

> *A number of our students are non-verbal and a lot of others have a lot of speech problems so we felt it would be just confusing to introduce another language to the students.*
>
> principal

> *Fifty percent of our children in this school are non-oral, which means that none of them will ever be able to speak in English let alone Spanish.*
>
> parent

> *Well I guess the very first time I thought, oh great, why not teach him another language, he can't make himself clearly understood in English, so let's introduce another language, and I couldn't see that there was really any point.*
>
> parent

The second standpoint that influenced the initial response of parents and educators to the prospect of special needs children learning a language other than English was the extent to which their philosophy of education for special needs children was driven by functionalism.

For some parents and teachers LOTE could not be considered as having any practical application. It was not seen as being relevant to the children's long term functioning within society:

> *I question the functionality of it. I question whether these kids are going to need this when they leave school.*
>
> special needs teacher

> *I have some idea of what's going to happen to my 12 year old kids in the future. I've seen it and I know that Spanish isn't what they need. Is that clear enough?*
>
> special needs teacher

> *It's hard enough teaching him what we want to teach him without having to deprogram him as well from stuff that isn't necessary or important or valid for you know trying to obviously set him up so that he can maximise his potential ... he's only got so much ability and we don't want to use up some of that ability with stuff that's not relevant.*
>
> parent

Two parents, each of whom had a child suffering autism, expressed the functionalist viewpoint very forcibly, but only with respect to their own children. Both highlighted the difficulties with language development and communication that are associated with autism as the reason for withdrawal of their child. In the words of one of these parents,

> *It's how the autistic child perceives language which is really quite different from how other children with special needs perceive language.*

Neither of these parents was anti-LOTE *per se*, just anti-LOTE for their particular child.

Interestingly, many stakeholders, parents in particular, saw the inclusion of a language other than English, not in a negative sense at all, but as a way of enriching the curriculum for their children:

> *She's got to learn new things any way. I mean she's becoming a lot more independent and things like this are helping her along the way.*
>
> parent

It's diversifying her. She's not just stuck in the one rut sort of mainstream learning, if you know what I mean.

parent

Anything that can work that can help him to understand his environment better is beneficial.

parent

It may just help her with giving her a little bit more of an outlook on something different.

parent

Our children get so much crammed into them that is essential for life skills ... so they are constantly under pressure and I think when you introduce another language, they actually have some fun, and its quite nice for them to have something in the curriculum other than just pure bombarding of learning that they must grasp.

parent

Those few parents and educators whose initial opinions are not reflected in the comments cited above tended to come to the research project with attitudes such as 'wait and see' 'let's give it a go' or total non-commitment.

After

So, to what extent did the views of principals, teachers and parents change as a result of the implementation of LOTE in the case study schools?

A number of parents, who had strong views because of the specific circumstances of their own children, had their children excluded from LOTE. The number of these children totalled five and they were removed either before the program started, or in the very beginning stages of LOTE implementation. None of the parents was against the program for other children.

A number of parents who expressed strong initial reservations changed their minds. For some this was because LOTE turned out to be rather different from what they expected, for others it

was because of benefits they came to perceive for their children, and for yet others, because functionalism became less dominant. The mind changes of two such parents are recorded below. From one parent,

> *... But I'm glad that he did it, because it's not the way you think it's going to be at all, and it doesn't matter if he never goes to Italy and uses it. ... for Bryn, it* [learning Italian] *encompasses a lot of things. It helps him with his speech generally. It helps him with his articulation and helps him with his confidence ... you know, whether he actually speaks fluent Italian is irrelevant, because he gets all these other benefits from it.*

And from another,

> *I'm happy about it now. At first I wasn't, but yeah I am now because she seems to get a lot out of it ... It seems like it's particularly the cultural thing that Anastasia's getting out of it, being exposed to those different experiences.*

There is no evidence of parents who were initially positive or non-committal reacting negatively to program implementation and the learning experiences of the children.

With regard to special needs teachers, a number who had been very sceptical altered their viewpoint:

> *But then once we got into it and I could see that it was like an integrated kind of program, not just specifically LOTE language and LOTE memory and all that sort of thing, it was actually integrated as an art and a cooking kind of experience for the children, the children and myself started to get really into this, and we realised that it was more than just a second language, that it was actually a cultural experience and a supplement to our program.*
>
> special needs teacher

> *It* [a lesson] *was an absolute ripper because it was concrete, it was hands on, the kids loved it and it was great and I really don't see any problem with her* [the teacher] *speaking Japanese now if we can maintain that type of practical session. It was fantastic you know and I ate my words. Have no pride. Having to admit I was wrong. You know I didn't think it would work and it did.*
>
> special needs teacher

For most, there was acceptance and cautious optimism, although the degree of personal involvement varied greatly. One special needs teacher remained vehemently opposed to the program.

Ancillary staff reflected a range of viewpoints, often related to the extent to which there was personal involvement with LOTE. A number of staff at one case study site expressed considerable disappointment that, even though invited on several occasions to watch a LOTE class in action, the speech therapist refused, and was totally dismissive of the notion of second language learning within the special needs context.

The three school communities have continued their support of LOTE with the majority of special needs students having some form of exposure to a language other than English program.

Second language learning: Reaction and responses by learners

Although it was difficult for many of the students to articulate their own views about LOTE, their reactions were easily gauged. Observation, together with interviews with staff and parents, provided an extensive body of information. There was no evidence of negativity:

> *They didn't say this is too hard, I don't understand, I don't want to do this. No one has ever said that. They always look forward to it.*
>
> special needs teacher

The children who were interviewed all commented positively and highlighted the practical and fun dimensions of their LOTE program:

> *I like it because we paint all the time and make stuff ... I like doing that stuff ... and I like writing down sentences and I like how the teacher talks to us.*
>
> special needs student

> *You get to colour in, draw farm animals, to read books, and get to play games.*
>
> special needs student

Parents also commented extensively about the enjoyment experienced by their children. As one parent put it:

> *He loves it. He loves it. He really enjoys it.*

Learner response to the experience was succinctly summed up by one of the principals, who stated that,

> *You cannot argue against something being taught when you walk in and see those children absorbed and just enjoying it so much.*

If enjoyment is the measure of success then special needs learners of languages other then English have given the experience their seal of approval.

Second language learning: The approach and the learning environment

But there must be more than enjoyment if second language learning is to be considered a valid component of special needs curriculum. It is therefore necessary to describe the approach that has been developed, through this study, for use in the special needs context. As this research was conducted across three diverse sites, all at different stages of implementation and all having different languages and teachers, the research project provided the opportunity for the conditions associated with a successful program to be investigated. As a result of the research it is possible to identify a number of characteristics that have emerged as being essential to the development of an effective second language learning classroom environment.

A place where learning experiences are fun, active, stimulating and concrete

The enjoyment dimension referred to previously, whilst not enough in itself, is important. Evidence from the case study sites points to the need for the second language to be presented through an extensive range of short, active, engaging and different tasks. This variety of tasks provides different ways of dealing with, and revisiting and reinforcing, similar content and concepts in both English and the second language. The active and concrete experiences often associated with areas such as Art, Music, and Physical Education are ideal for this purpose.

A target language rich environment

At the commencement of this research project, staff at two of the case study sites expressed considerable concern at the notion of using the target language itself as the medium for instruction, and both commenced their programs with English as the predominant language. In one program, where the intention was to teach the LOTE through Physical Education, students were exposed to language such as *throw me the red pelota* [ball]. At the second site students received what was essentially cultural information about the target language speaking community, in English. At the third site (Merriwa ESC), where LOTE had been part of the curriculum for over twelve months, the target language was being used as the medium of instruction to very good effect because of the concrete experiences being provided by the LOTE teacher, through Art, Music and Cooking.

In response to the Merriwa experience, and as a result of some cajoling from members of the research team, the teacher at Carson Street decided to 'take the plunge' and use the target language throughout his Physical Education sessions. It was with some surprise that he reported that the children *didn't turn a hair.*

> *At first I was afraid to give the kids too much language because I thought it might overpower them when really it is the exact opposite. Give the kids as much as you can and they'll take out of it what they can.*
>
> special needs and LOTE teacher

The process at the last of the case study sites was more difficult because of the different professional experiences of the language teacher. Significant progress was, however, made at this site over the duration of the research project.

Target language used extensively, and in conjunction with concrete, active and stimulating tasks was demonstrated, through this research project, to be an effective component of special needs second language pedagogy.

A safe and supportive learning environment

It was evident that this was an exceedingly important condition for learning a second language within the special needs context. The LOTE learning environment had to accommodate risk taking and be supportive of kids 'having a go'. Errors had to be seen as a positive part of the learning process and not indicative of getting something wrong. The research team monitored this closely and there was a strong correlation between this factor and positive outcomes for learners. The importance of this dimension was highlighted by the parent of a Down Syndrome child who commented that this had particular benefits for her son in terms, not only of LOTE, but for his overall confidence:

> *Children with Down Syndrome in particular are what they call errorless learners. So they have to learn it correctly the first time, otherwise they get very defeated, so they're loath to try something new in case they can't do it. But yes I think Bryn has got more confident and I think in his speech therapy too now he's more confident. He's more willing to try and explain and try more difficult questions rather than just say I don't know, so that's what he needs.*

An environment where the second language is the medium rather than just an end in itself

Right from the outset of this research project there was no intention to have language proficiency considered as a possible program outcome. Enrichment was seen, by the team and the schools involved, as the pervading rationale. Over the course of the project, however, it became clear that a very real benefit of LOTE was that it provided another medium for both communication and curriculum content. It provided another opportunity for learners to re-visit, to reinforce, to repeat, to consolidate essential concepts and content from 'regular' areas of the curriculum and to enact the routine of school life. LOTE provided the medium to allow this to happen without the children feeling the tedium of repetition.

An environment where there is commitment and collaboration.

If LOTE is seen not as an end in itself, however, but as another way of engaging students with the experiences of the classroom and the day to day transactions that take place in a school then there is another dimension that becomes critical. The Languages Other Than English program has to become a collaborative enterprise with a collective commitment to it. Commitment at one of the case study sites was embryonic. This impacted significantly on the possibilities for collaboration, which in turn, influenced the effective functioning of the LOTE program. At the other case study sites, where the programs were grounded in a shared commitment, this was not an issue.

Moreover, the notion of collaboration can be seen from a number of perspectives. In the first instance there is collaboration between the LOTE teacher and the special needs teacher as well as with ancillary staff. How collaborative planning worked for the benefit of the learners at one case study site is demonstrated by the following remarks:

> *We would work out a theme ... and what we thought should be in that theme. Then the LOTE teacher would use her ideas and resources that she had to get that across.*
>
> special needs teacher

> *If they're covering farming, life on the farm, animals on the farm, produce on the farm, well that's important and I know I've got some resources for that ... I've got songs, I've got books on farming, I've got games that I can make from farming, I can make up charts that will help them. I can bring in all the different types of grains. We can grow some grains. We can make popcorn that comes from corn, all these sorts of things.*
>
> LOTE teacher

But collaboration can mean more than this. The interaction of LOTE teacher and classroom teacher to help each other manage and evaluate student learning was an important dimension of classrooms observed through the case studies. In addition, and very importantly, having the classroom teacher and support staff collaborate with students as co-learners of the second

language was immensely powerful for teachers, and also for the learners themselves. Finally, for the students to actively collaborate with each other to help decode and make meaning from target language input provided a dimension of the special needs classroom that proved to have powerful consequences for learning and also for the development of relationships, particularly at two of the case study sites.

An environment where the focus is on understanding

The focus on understanding, on ensuring that there was provision of contextual cues for students, together with teaching students how to make meaning of the second language through such cues was a significant part of the pedagogical development included in the project. For two of the teachers this came quite naturally, probably because one had experience teaching in a partial immersion program while the other was a skilled special needs teacher. But, for the third LOTE teacher this was an area of difficulty and it took considerable time for her to be comfortable with this approach. No negative consequences for the learners were observed, probably because, at this early stage of the project, the language was of sufficient curiosity in its own right to keep them engaged. It can be hypothesised, however, that had this trend continued, learners may have become disengaged with the possible consequence of there being negative outcomes.

This situation with this third case study site serves to reinforce that a focus on receptive knowledge and the development of receptive skills is appropriate for students with special needs but that this requires a particular pedagogy that can not automatically be assumed of a language teacher. If the language teacher has had no experience of special needs children then it may be that the teacher will be unaware of the receptive capacity of many non-verbal students and of their ability to communicate understanding in a variety of non-verbal ways.

There may also be an automatic expectation of production (speaking and writing) as there was at this one case study site. Language production was in evidence from some students involved in this research but observation and evaluation of the case study programs suggest that neither this, nor accuracy of language use, should be considered as a dominant focus within the special needs context and certainly not for beginning learners. The extent to which language production can be expected will have to be the subject of a longitudinal study but in some instances expectations have already been exceeded. One special needs teacher reported,

> *I remember distinctly saying to her* [the LOTE teacher] *'no writing ... just lots of verbal, doing lots of fun activities ... I don't want them to do any writing' whereas now I have changed.*

A place where learning is facilitated by a highly competent teacher

Much of the previous discussion highlights the very particular importance of who the LOTE teacher is within a special needs context. The three case study sites investigated for this project provided the research team with the opportunity to observe three different teachers whose experiences were quite diverse. From extensive observation and involvement with the three teachers, and their programs, the project team is confident in recommending the following:

- that the generic teaching skills of the LOTE teacher must be highly developed
- that the teacher must be able to make what is happening in the classroom comprehensible
- that the teacher enjoy working with special needs children and is able to provide them with fun and fulfilling language learning experiences with a concrete dimension.

The evidence from the case study sites also suggests that it is a considerable advantage for the LOTE teacher to have an additional area of expertise such as Music, Art or Physical Education.

Through the experiences of members of the research team, through observation of the programs in operation, and through interviews with key stakeholders it has been possible to develop this profile of an effective second language learning environment. In the following section of this paper the outcomes of learning in this environment will be examined.

Second language outcomes

There was enormous variety in the needs and abilities of the special needs students involved in this research project. As a consequence, there was commensurate variety in their outcomes. For some students, who were categorised as multi-disabled, outcomes were predictively very limited. For other students there were considerable successes in both reception and production. The diversity of learners and learning contexts makes it difficult to either generalise or be definitive about the second language learning outcomes achieved by the students involved in the case study programs. In Table 1, however, some of the things that special needs children may be able to do in a second language are reported. All the outcomes presented in Table 1 were observed during the research project. The information in Table 1 is categorised according to the Western Australian LOTE Learning Outcome Areas. Included are the language modes of listening, speaking, reading writing and viewing. Also included are other important dimensions of language learning. These relate to sociolinguistic and sociocultural understandings as well as to the system of the target language. This picture of learning is also augmented by the inclusion of the significant area of language learning strategies.

Table 1 Second language outcomes

Listening and responding, and speaking	Viewing, reading and responding	Writing
• Able to respond by turning and listening when hearing target language input (non-verbal student). • Able to indicate choice through eye movement in response to target language question (non-verbal student). • Able to demonstrate comprehension by selection of the appropriate compic. • Able to respond through actions to target language instructions. (eg Hit the bubble with your head. Put the scarf around your neck.) • Able to use the target language independently in the playground to ask another student to *come here*. • Able to independently request silence, in the target language, in the LOTE classroom.	• Able to independently choose a target language book in silent reading and in other lessons. • Requesting target language videos during lunch break. • With extensive contextual and teacher support is able to recognise a book as being in the target language. • Able to chorus a target language big book with the teacher. • Able to use interactive CD Rom programs in the target language. • Maintains attention while watching a target language video (non verbal, multi-disabled student). • Identifies words and phrases from target language support charts.	• Able to trace a word of a scripted language. • Able to copy target language words and phrases off the board. • Able to label pictures and objects using the target language.
Cultural understandings	**The system of the target language**	**Language learning strategies**
• Able to locate on a globe a country where the target language is spoken. • Able to make, in response to target language instructions, food associated with target language speaking communities. • Recognises and sings along to music reflective of the target language culture. • Is involved in wheelchair dancing to music reflective of the target language culture. • Able to identify family heritage as a consequence of the second language learning experience. • Able to identify and name cultural artefacts. • Able to identify and endeavour to communicate with native speakers of the target language.	• Able to appreciate that target language word order is different. (eg positioning of nouns and adjectives). • Able to differentiate between gender in the target language. • Able to identify a target language as having a different writing system.	• Able to use contextual cues such as body language, key word signing, compic, wall charts and labels to derive meaning. • Independently requests to use a dictionary. • Asks the LOTE teacher for lexical items beyond those directly included in the LOTE program. • Asks a peer for assistance with meaning making.

Other learning outcomes

The second language learning environment of the three case study programs, together with the strategies used by the teachers, and the strategies and skills taught to the students, resulted in many of the special needs students developing their range of generic skills and competencies. Whilst the development of these skills was observed in association with the learning of a LOTE, the skills themselves can be seen as important to student learning across the curriculum and also in supporting the students' development of essential life skills. There was a great deal of evidence from the research project that functionalism as a key focus of the educational vision and purpose for special needs students was, in fact, well served through LOTE. There was significant evidence from all three case study sites of social skills, physical skills, listening and attending skills and communication skills being considerably enhanced for many of the learners. There is also considerable evidence linking the development of these skills to enhanced self-esteem and confidence. In addition, other learning outcomes and general literacy development was observed within the three second language learning contexts.

Social skills

The extensive use of the target language within the case study programs meant that students needed to cooperate with the teacher, and with each other, in order to work out what was happening, and what was required of them. The evidence suggests that this process enhanced the abilities of the students to interact effectively with each other and to also be more tolerant of each other and of difference. The principal of one of the case study schools cited the following example:

> *One of the really interesting things we've found when we started LOTE was a couple of children with very, very racist attitudes, and in fact we had one child who wouldn't play when he found out that one of the kids was Italian — said*

> *'I'm not playing with him, I don't like Chinese.' So that was something for us to come to terms with and he did it.*

A number of staff commented on the issue of acceptance and the development of social skills and saw the link with their students learning to operate more effectively in the wider community.

Physical skills

At Carson Street school much of the LOTE program was presented to learners through their involvement with Physical Education. Students learnt LOTE whilst they worked in the school's mini gym. They learnt LOTE whilst they danced, and they learnt LOTE in the swimming pool. LOTE and the development of physical skills became inextricably mixed.

At the remaining case study sites, whilst there wasn't the same emphasis, the development of physical skills was still associated with second language learning as children were involved in language tasks that required cutting, drawing, using duplo, folding paper, using eating utensils and performing other physical actions. LOTE provided another vehicle for the development of these skills.

Listening and attending skills

> *We're finding that a lot of the kids are actually listening and paying a lot more attention to what's going on.*
>
> special needs teacher

This comment was echoed by many of the educators involved in the research project. There was considerable comment on the students being engaged in their work and spending long periods of time concentrating and listening. The importance of this to the students' work in other areas did not go unremarked:

> *It's really gaining their attention and maintaining their attention a lot better than some of the other programs we run within the school.*
>
> principal

Similarly, the benefits of enhanced listening and attending skills, beyond school, was also commented on

> *I mean the kids are never going to produce too much in the future if they can't listen, and if they can't attend, and LOTE is addressing those skills through the medium of Spanish.*
>
> special needs and LOTE teacher

There was some concern early in the program that enhanced listening and attending may have been a by-product of the novelty of the second language learning experience, and that as an outcome for learners, this would not be sustained. The Merriwa program suggests otherwise. This program has been in operation since 1996 and enhanced listening and attending are still considered to be significant and ongoing outcomes.

Communication skills

Meaning making, both from text, and through text, emerged as a significant area in terms of skill development. Because of the approach used, with the extensive use of target language input, students were forced to learn to make meaning from the context in which they were learning and through the cues provided. Whilst this was acknowledged as a significant benefit by numerous educators, it was also appreciated by parents. The parent of a child who is deaf commented on the LOTE teacher's use of gesture both assisting her daughter to understand and then also to communicate herself:

> *Anastasia learns more from visual things than she does from language. I mean she really needs a lot of visual stimulation which she gets from that* [LOTE] ... *She is also using more gesture now herself.*

A number of other parents commented on the development of their children's confidence and linked this to enhanced communication skills.

Oral language and oral communication skills were also the subject of specific comment by the principals of all the case study programs. Comments from principals included:

> *Anything that focuses on oral language is going to improve their English.*

And

> *A bit of a spin off in the speech therapy side is that a lot of the words the kids are being instructed to attempt to pronounce they're actually trying to get their tongue around sounds that they have a lot of difficulty with in English ... so the practice from that point of view is very beneficial as well.*

Comment was also made with regard to the difficulty of getting the students to practise articulating sounds in English. Students were often seen as reluctant to do this because it was considered to be repetitive and boring. But students seemed more than happy to articulate and practice sounds if it was done through the LOTE.

Self-esteem

The evidence from this research project suggests, however, that one of the greatest benefits of second language learning for students with special needs has been the enhancement of their self-esteem. This result was commented on widely by both educators and parents. The interview transcripts abound with comments about growth in self-esteem and confidence, and this growth was readily identifiable through classroom observation.

> *It's been wonderful for their self-esteem because they can do it.*
>
> principal

> *The biggest thing that's come through probably has been benefits to kids' self-esteem in that a lot of them are actually able to produce a lot of positive results and for some kids that's been quite difficult to get positives out of the educational program ...*
>
> special needs and LOTE teacher

> *They are getting a feeling of success from it.*
>
> special needs teacher

He is a lot more confident in himself. He can do something that Mummy can't do.

parent

Learning LOTE for students within the case study programs was a 'failure free' experience. There didn't have to be tangible, functional outcomes but there could be. This factor, combined with the approach described in the previous section of this paper, enabled the development of positive self-image and confidence in children who had previously been insecure and unsuccessful. This has been a very clear outcome for many students involved in this research project and confirms that second language learning should not be seen as an end in itself. Rather, it should be appreciated as a mechanism for facilitating positive experiences for children that also has the potential to enhance and develop student learning in LOTE and through LOTE.

Other learning area outcomes

The 'through LOTE' dimension arises out of the contexts of the activities used for second language learning during the course of the research project. Many of these contexts were based in other learning areas, for example, Maths, Health and Physical Education, Society and Environment, The Arts, Technology and Enterprise.[2] Because of this, it has been possible to document special needs students achieving the desired outcomes of other learning areas through their work in LOTE. Table 2 provides some examples of this:

[2] These learning areas are described using the terminology of the *Western Australian Curriculum Framework*.

Table 2 Other learning area outcomes

The Arts Students completed drawings. They listened to music and sang songs. They made exaggerated gestures.
Society and Environment Students are able to identify target language speaking countries on a map.
Mathematics Students were involved in counting, recognising numbers and using large numbers (the population of a country).
Technology and Enterprise Students made various shapes and containers and used duplo to make objects.
Health and Physical Education Students developed their motor skills by throwing and catching objects. Personal hygene was attended to through the second language, (for example, washing hands before eating).
Science Through the target language students explored the production of wheat, its processing into flour, and then bread.

Literacy

In an educational climate where there is so much emphasis on literacy, the project team is able to report that activities involving literacy abounded in the special needs second language classrooms associated with this project. Students were constantly observed associating text with visual images; associating pictures with oral stimulus; predicting the content of text by using headings, visual cues and known words; and making meaning from text using the same devices. Students were also observed making links between spoken and written forms of language, recounting facts in oral or written form, understanding culturally specific conventions of communication and also demonstrating some degree of computer literacy.

Monitoring and recording the outcomes

The achievement of outcomes (LOTE specific, generic, related to other learning areas) was monitored across all three case study sites by members of the research team. The LOTE

teachers also monitored the LOTE outcomes and two of these teachers were actively involved in the observation and recording of development in generic skill areas and in other outcome domains. The third LOTE teacher did not feel that she had the expertise to do this. At two of the case study sites special needs teachers also actively took part, not only in learning with the students, but also in observing and recording their achievements. Again, at the third of the case study sites this was problematic. The special needs teachers in this environment didn't feel that they could learn LOTE themselves and record their observations of student learning at the same time. Their discomfort was attributed to the early stage of implementation, to them not feeling enough ownership or understanding of the program, and also in part, to observation not seeming to be as integral a part in the evaluation of student learning as it was at the other two case study sites. The outcomes of student learning were reported through regular communication procedures at two schools, and LOTE was included in the development of all individual education programs at these same schools.

The extent of achievement of outcomes, (both LOTE and other learning outcomes) varied enormously within, and across sites. For some students classified as multidisabled 'wheelchair dancing' to music from target language speaking communities, and attendance at video screenings were the limit of the LOTE experience. For these students the demonstration of any outcomes in any areas of their curriculum was extremely limited. At the other end of the spectrum there was evidence of students comprehending extended oral text (teacher target language input), of them being able to write some conceptually complete text in the target language, and even of them being able to use a bilingual dictionary. In effect the students at the three case study sites demonstrated that they were able to learn LOTE at least as well as they could learn anything else, and that, in addition, there were very often considerable spin offs for other dimensions of learning, growth and development.

Implementation issues

The development of a program that is able to support an effective LOTE learning environment where the outcomes described in this paper can be achieved does, however, require considerable planning, liaison and expertise. Decisions need to be made with regard to the language to be taught, and to its place within the curriculum. Critical decisions have to be taken in relation to choice of teacher and to developing a collective sense of involvement and support within the school and its community. This research project has shown that these can indeed be difficult decisions, that the processes of consultation and dealing with disagreement can be challenging, and that the management of implementation can impact significantly on the potential for program success. Of the three case study sites included in this research project, two had a structured and relatively cohesive approach to implementation. At the third case study site implementation was far more *ad hoc* and the decisions taken were less well informed. The consequences of this were observable through the learning environment, the approach used in the classroom and the outcomes demonstrated by learners.

As a result then of being able to monitor implementation at these three different sites, the research team has been able to produce a set of implementation guidelines (Hogan and Norris 1999). These guidelines provide both information and support mechanisms for program implementation, maintenance and review. Used in conjunction with the videos that have been produced by the project team, these guidelines present important information that is easily accessible to both educators and parents.

It is not the intention here to discuss the guidelines in detail, but a number of key areas addressed in the guidelines, will be briefly explored.

Should all students learn a second language?

There is no clear answer to this question. There is no evidence from this research project to suggest that there were any negative outcomes for any of the special needs students who had LOTE included in their curriculum. There were certainly a number of parents who feared negative outcomes and who therefore chose to withdraw their children from the LOTE program. Whilst the views of parents must be respected, informed decision-making needs to be encouraged and supported. It is important for parents to see the language program in action as part of the decision making process.

Evidence from the research project also suggests that it is important for educators in special needs contexts not to try to 'second guess' what LOTE might mean for any particular child:

> *When I first started I must say I probably aimed most of the class at the more verbal kids who could give me that verbal interaction, but I've found over the course of things it's actually Kimberley who's probably more clued on to what's going on in the class and giving more sustained and correct responses and she indicates her preference by non verbal manner, be it smiling when she wants to agree with what I'm saying, or shaking her head when she doesn't, and in fact it's someone like Kimberley who probably would be the last person that I've expected to get anything too much out of the class, who's actually given me the most back and it's stuff like that that just makes you think you know for anyone to sit there and say LOTE is no good for this child, you just never know.*
>
> special needs and LOTE teacher

In fact, this issue of educators making well-intentioned decisions on behalf of their learners is succinctly and powerfully addressed by the principal at Merriwa:

> *I would have been one of the most anti-LOTE teachers around for special needs children. I guess it wasn't really till I went to a LOTE conference that I realised that what I was saying was that this is what these children can't do rather than well, let them decide.*

LOTE's place within the Education Support Centre or School

The place of LOTE in two of the case study sites was demonstrably much more cemented than in the third. It was also clear to the research team that where the programs were cemented, they worked better. This observation was shared by a number of teachers:

> *What I believe is for the program to work, the whole school has to kind of be involved ... it's been very much a group approach.*
>
> special needs and LOTE teacher

And,

> *It's a bit of a team teaching situation. I see myself as a support teacher for Mary* [the LOTE teacher]. *Mary's got the skills and the direction and I just keep an eye on children's behaviour and I keep an eye on children keeping on task and I also, I'm also learning as well as much as I can, so I would see myself as totally as a support person and a learner too.*
>
> special needs teacher

And,

> *We have to be part of it and try and involve ourselves as much as possible with the children.*
>
> special needs teacher

It was evident from this research that the whole school approach not only involved more members of the school community — both educators and parents —but also, that it expanded the opportunities for the achievement of learning outcomes in addition to those specifically aligned with LOTE. Given this conclusion, it is important that the implementation process take account of whole school involvement in determining LOTE's place within the school.

Criticality of the LOTE teacher

Whilst there are a myriad of issues associated with implementation, this research project has clearly demonstrated the criticality of who the LOTE teacher is. The most important decision to be made is the selection of the teacher:

> *We had to have someone who knew our kids and worked well with our kids and we had to have someone that did all the things that we do as in like you know meeting the kids on the bus, feeding, toileting, changing, all those things had to be part of the program.*
>
> deputy principal

The teacher persona and teacher expertise at two of the case study sites had a profound impact on the way LOTE was received, and on the success of the case study programs:

> *I'm not sure if it would be such a wonderful experience if it was somebody different. It would just depend on who was delivering the LOTE to the Ed Support children. I think Mrs O'brecht is very gifted and is able to get to the kids' level and impart her language quite proficiently with the kids.*
>
> special needs teacher

The experience of monitoring implementation across these three case study sites has enabled the telling of three quite different stories. But there are many common threads, and at the conclusion of the project, the research team felt confident that it had gathered very considerable evidence in respect of factors, conditions and outcomes likely to be associated with the provision of second language learning for children with special needs.

Postscript

12 months on ...

The three case study sites were left to their own devices for a 12-month period. At the end of this time each of the sites was revisited for an up-date. At follow-up interviews data were collected from principals, from the LOTE teachers, and also from special needs teachers. Data analysis yielded a number of areas for discussion and these are explored in this postscript.

Whole school approach

Whole school commitment has continued to be a critical factor in the provision of successful and worthwhile second language learning experiences for children with special needs. At two of the case study sites whole school commitment is strong. In the words of one of the principals:

> *It* [LOTE] *fits in a spot now. It has its place.*

There were continuing reminders from these two schools, however, of the need to monitor the context in which LOTE is taught and learnt. From one of the LOTE teachers,

> *You must control the environment. You must pay attention to the environment.*

And from a principal, a reminder not to let the learning partnership lapse. The context of this remark was interesting. The LOTE program has proven so successful, and the LOTE teacher so respected by her special needs colleagues, that classroom teachers felt superfluous. The principal, however, reiterated how important it is for the learning partnership to be maintained citing as reasons, carry through into other areas of the curriculum, the benefits of teachers co-learning with their students, and also the monitoring of leaning outcomes. She cautioned against complacency in regard to liaison between LOTE and special needs teachers if the potential of a LOTE program is to be maximised.

At the third of the case study sites the impact of the lack of a whole school approach was very much in evidence. The program still exists but in a reduced form with only the older students having LOTE in their program. The special needs teacher of this class was not on staff during the research project. Whilst being supportive of the children having the experience, the teacher herself was not a co-learner with the children, and she had not even considered that it might be appropriate to liase with the LOTE teacher about program content.

> *I didn't think to plan collectively and I didn't think about their IEPs* [individual education programs].

The LOTE teacher at this site too is new and appears to have had little induction into the school, or any aspect of educating children with special needs.

The principal of the school still professes to be supportive of LOTE but has assumed a low profile in terms of coordination and program management. As a result, LOTE in this context is segmented and tokenistic. The principal sees the solution as the appointment of yet another teacher to the program. He didn't appear to appreciate the importance of his own role in nurturing a whole school approach to the learning of a language other than English in a special needs context.

The teachers

Certainly, who the teacher is who is teaching the LOTE still emerges as a fundamental consideration. The principals of both Merriwa and Carson Street confirmed the importance of teacher persona to the success of their programs. The importance of the teacher was also acknowledged by the third principal who is actively seeking to employ the Merriwa LOTE teacher in the coming year.

At Carson Street a second teacher is being mentored and a student teacher is shadowing the LOTE teacher. The school hopes that this process will provide back up at the school as well as increasing the pool of teachers able to operate effectively in the special needs context.

The Outcomes

Positive learning outcomes are reported from two of the case study sites. There continues to be an appreciation of LOTE as the medium through which much else can be achieved, in

addition to LOTE having outcomes in its own right. Listening and attending, general language development, social development and self-esteem continue to be highlighted as important outcomes, able to be achieved by special needs learners, through the second language experience.

In terms of specific outcomes for LOTE, at Carson Street the teacher felt compelled to improve his own level of proficiency in order that his learners could maximise their learning outcomes:

> *They* [the students] *are really pushing me. They expect me to use it* [the LOTE] *all the time now and I can't do it comfortably.*

In response to this situation, the teacher undertook study in-country, and a background speaker of the target language was also brought into the program. The resultant language rich environment is one able to support the continuing achievement of LOTE and other learning outcomes and these are incorporated into student IEPs as a matter of course.

Merriwa ESC has been able to report some considerable successes in terms of their program and learner outcomes. Different dimensions have been added to the program. In the early days of LOTE, the staff had experimented with drama but the program was unsuccessful because the learners *didn't know how to pretend.* A further attempt at LOTE thorough drama this year is reported as having been most successful.

With the junior class there has been a different focus. The children were experiencing difficulty with play and with cooperation and relationships. It was decided to try and address this issue through LOTE. The junior class undertook a term of social games in Italian. The LOTE teacher and principal reported that this unit of work had been highly successful:

> *They couldn't play musical chairs – now they can.*

The children at Merriwa have also now had considerable exposure to Italy as a country:

> *They are able to think about Italy as somewhere other than here – they can handle it.*
>
> principal

How such an abstract concept could be successfully taught, in the target language, to special needs learners was recounted by the principal. She explained that for something like the history and culture of Italy to be accessible to the students in her school,

> *It has to be really remarkable … The remarkable thing here was that Mary had been there.*

The inclusion of a great deal of Italian realia also made the experiences of the teacher, and the input provided by the teacher in regard to Italy, real and meaningful for the learners.

In terms of the development of the language modes at this case study site, the LOTE teacher reported that the amount of reading and writing had increased:

> *I try now to cover all the modes in each lesson but the juniors are not writing at the moment. … today* [15-11-00] *was the first time that I have written on the board – I get the feeling that they can cope with it.*

She also reports that the older students are now producing formulaic phrases and some extended text as spontaneous response, rather than just single words, and that there is evidence of them re-cycling language and building on language from previous themes.

At the last of the case study sites it is reported that the children are still enjoying LOTE. It is unlikely that this will be continue, however, given that the learners have done nothing more than colour in and learn the names of shapes and the animals in the 12 months since the completion of the research project. There has been only very restricted target language input from the teacher, and learning outcomes are extremely limited:

> *I don't think they have learnt any more this year than they did last year.*
>
> special needs teacher

The learners

There is still no evidence of learners being 'anti-LOTE', and there is considerable evidence of the converse. In addition, initial concerns about social disadvantage or language/cultural minority status impacting negatively on learning in a LOTE program have not been realised. There are a number of special needs students involved in the case study programs for whom Standard Australian English is a second language. There is no evidence of this impacting negatively on their learning, and considerable anecdotal evidence of LOTE supporting literacy development.

An interesting turn of events has been that a number of children, including two autistic children, who had previously been excluded from LOTE by their parents, have now been re-integrated. At Carson Street Special School there is now no child excluded from the program. The principal explained that this change had come about, partly because people have been able to see and experience the program, and partly because the social benefits of students continuing to be part of a group, rather than excluded from the group, were acknowledged.

Perceptions beyond the programs

For those who have not experienced a successful LOTE program in a special needs context, however, there is often still the lingering doubt. The question is still posed — why introduce a second language if they can't read or write English? This perception of LOTE being inappropriate for special needs students continues out there in the community, and is actively perpetuated by some medical professionals who deal with special needs students. One educator reminded the project team that in special needs education, *the medical model has not gone* and that because of this, therapists are missing opportunities for their work to interface with other areas of the curriculum, including LOTE.

It is clear, however, that since the inception of the research project, the perceptions of many have changed, and that there is now some curiosity and interest within other Western Australian special education centres, units and schools about the possibilities offered through the implementation of a second language learning program.

And beyond ...

How this interest translates, and what the future will be for LOTE and children with special needs, remains to be seen. Since the release of the *Two Languages Too* publications, however, a number of other programs have been established in Western Australia and initial reports are encouraging.

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